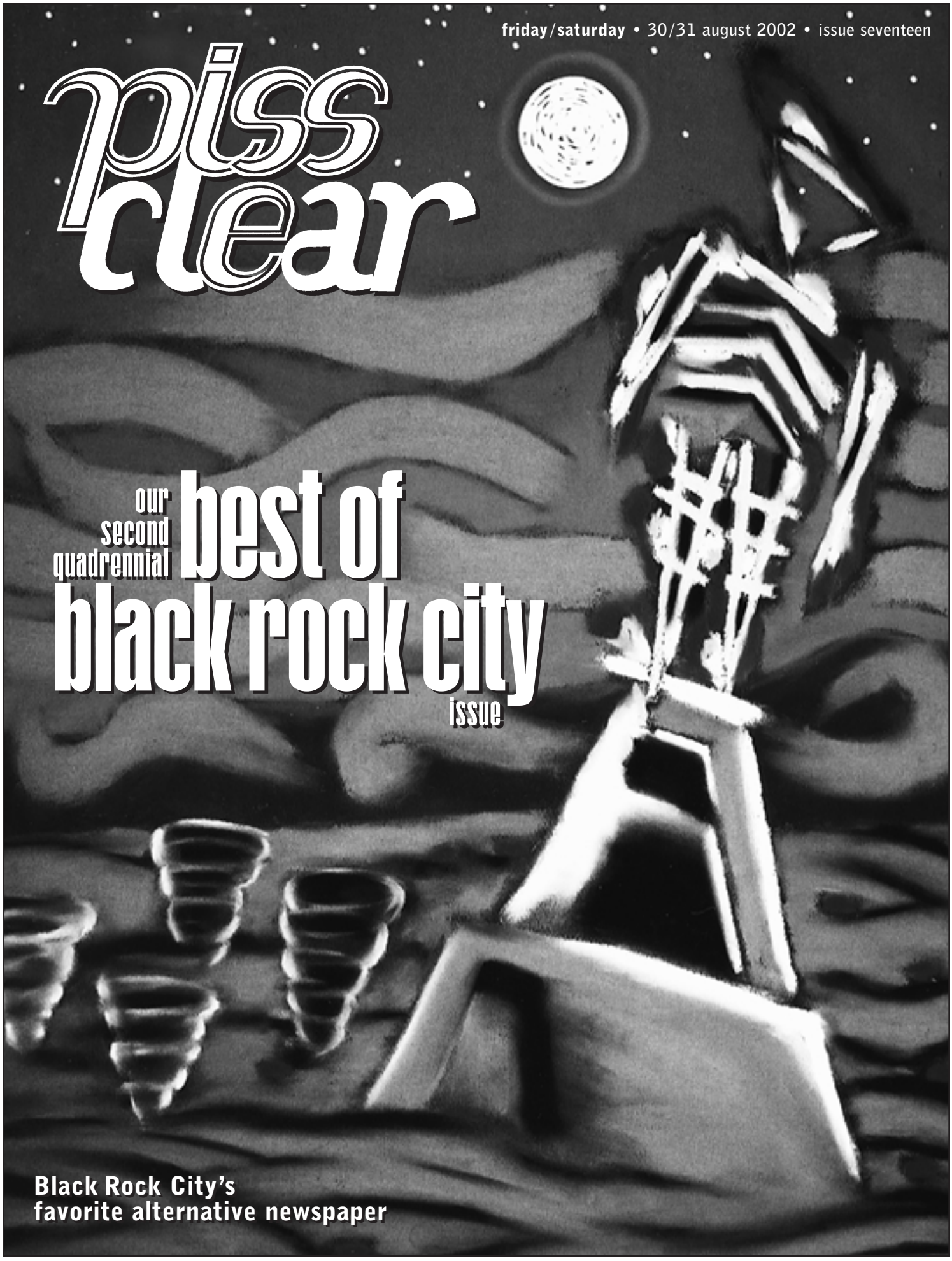
friday/saturday • 30/31 august 2002 • issue seventeen

piss clear

our second quadrennial best of black rock city issue



Black Rock City's favorite alternative newspaper

Illustration by Jeff Sax

Burning Man's snarky reality check, since 1995

Piss Clear

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Great Circle at Mainmast (2900') Center Camp, Black Rock City, NV

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For those about to Black Rock, we salute you

Mysterious D

adrian's rant

Imagine the biggest party you've ever thrown. Think about all the preparation you had to do. Think about how stressful it was planning it, and what a big pain in the ass it was cleaning it up. Now, multiply that by a million. That's what it's got to be like to throw an event like Burning Man.

As many of you already know, I'm in the San Francisco-based band **Blue Period.** Every month or two, we throw a glamorous rock 'n' roll party called **Glitz.** I'm almost always a complete stress-case getting ready for it. During the actual night of the event, I'm often running around like mad, making sure everything runs smoothly.

And if I'm that crazed throwing just one party in a nightclub, I can't imagine what it must be like to organize something as massive as Burning Man. Can you say, "no fun"? I don't know how they do it.

Being located right here in Center Camp, we're somewhat privy to the goings-on of the BMorg. It's not like we hang with them or anything, but we can see what they're up to. Meetings, mostly. Lots and lots of meetings. Imagine spending half your time on the playa in meetings. All I can say is, I'm sure as hell glad I don't have any of *their* jobs, even if I *did* get to drive around in a nifty golf cart.

Woo-hoo! We're done! Time to par-tay!

Not that publishing a newspaper on the playa is any easy task – but we've been doing it for so many years now, we've pretty much got it down to a science. I'd like to give a big shout-out to my guys from Waller Press, who come out here every year. Without their equipment and mad skills, you would not be holding this piece of dead tree in your hands right now.

I'm sorry to say that this is going to be the last issue we'll be publishing on the playa this year. At this point, we've just got two words for you: fuck this!

Now we get to be on vacation! After all, this is our 'Best of Black Rock City' issue – also known as the *Piss Clear* social agenda – and we are ready to par-tay! Besides, we're sick of missing out on all the Woo.

You know, the Woo. It's when you're somewhere in Black Rock City – up in an RV, writing an editorial on a laptop for instance – and you hear a bunch of people in the distance going, "Wooooo!!!" Nothing makes you feel more like you're missing out on something.

Still, it's not like you're ever going to see everything in Black Rock City anyway. Out in the Unknown, there are countless little treasures just waiting to be discovered – and that's part of the fun. You never know what you're going to find, especially at night.

If you haven't yet, hop on your bike and ride out into the open playa. See that tiny light off in the distance? Head towards it. And that other one? Go towards that one. I don't want to spoil any surprises for you. Just go out there and do it. Who knows? You might even find the secret *Piss Clear* newspaper rack.

We're urban freaks, not sea mariners

Okay, so it's been four days, and we still don't have this new stupid street system down. Half the time, we have no idea where the fuck we even *are*. I mean, come on! Streets as degrees on a compass? Avenues named after obscure ship parts no one's ever heard of? What the *fuck* were they thinking?

Hello BMorg! Look, we *get* how smart, educated, and sophisticated you all are. Now can you please just lay off the high-concept themes and intellectual grandstanding and simply name the fuckin' streets in a way that real people can understand? This is a city full of urban freaks, not crusty sea mariners. Get a clue!

That is, unless you're *trying* to confuse everyone. In that case, just keep on going with your bad elitist selves. You know we'll still show up anyway.

The Haves and the Have-Nots of BRC

Speaking of elistism, what's up with this stupid 'Floating World' Quest for Treasure game? You know, find the doubloons or tokens or whatever, and when you get enough of them, and do whatever it is you're supposed to do, then – and only then – will the Burning Man Powers-That-Be allow you to go up to the top of the Man's lighthouse. Follow the rules exactly, and maybe you can get to be in the "Burning Man Special Person Club!"

Frankly, this whole "find the coins, win a prize" concept seems pretty anti-Burning Man, if you ask me. I mean, isn't our "normal" American society goal-oriented enough? The BMorg makes such a big deal about how consumerism here is bad, and that they don't even want you to barter, and that it's all about building community. Then they turn around and make the Burning Man viewing platform this exclusive place, available only to a select few. Seems pretty elitist to me.

You just know those closely associated with the BMorg don't have to go through that whole "find the token" bullshit to get up there. And you know what I call that? "Class privilege."

I don't mean to sound like I'm bitching though, because I'm not. Every big city has its share of "haves" and "have-nots," and Black Rock City is no exception. Personally, I think it gives the town a cosmopolitan vibe. Then again, we work press privilege here every which way we can, so perhaps we're not the best ones to speak about elitism on the playa!

Anyway, whatever – we've been coming out here for ten years, so we'll just chalk up our snarky attitude to seniority and leave it at that!

See you on the web!

So we're outta here! We hope you've enjoyed *Piss Clear* this year! If you missed our other two issues, or want to check out articles from past years, be sure to visit the new-and-improved, updated-for-the-first-time-in-five-years, *Piss Clear* web site at: **www.blue-period.com/pissclear.** (Yeah, yeah, we know it's not pissclear.com, but we can't afford the $15,000 to buy the domain name.)

Many thanks to our fabulous web guru David Wisz, who completely redesigned and updated our site, especially since we could never get our shit together!

Have a good Burn everyone – *both* nights – and we'll see you out on the playa!

Adrian

The BRC Donner Award

a retrospective by GENEVIEVE J. PETRONE

Named after the ill-fated 1846 wagon train, Burning Man's Donner Award was given out each year by the Black Rock Rangers to the individual or group who pushed the limits of personal survival through stupidity, inattention, poor timing, or just bad luck.

During the early days of BM, survival was a matter of personal choice. Throwing a three-day party somewhere in the middle of a 400-square-mile dry lake bed required some knowledge of survival – especially when you invited the craziest people you knew. Add alcohol, guns, and sleep depravation. Then, factor in high winds and blinding dust storms. Compound the odds with cars doing 100 mph and take your chances with the occasional lighting bolt.

Oh yes, and on the last night, set fire to a giant wooden man in the middle of your camp and then burn everything else. Ah, those were the days.

history

1992: Ooops!

George Post

1992: Danger Ranger gave the first Donner Award to the pilot of a Cessna single-engine plane, who, after dramatically buzzing the camp three times, managed to land upside down on the playa just south of camp. The crash site, which was strewn with Oreo cookies, gave new meaning to the term "cargo cult." This popular art installation remained on the playa for three weeks, until it was finally visited by the Federal Aviation Administration and then carted out on a large flatbed truck.

1993: The Donner Award was given to an HBO video crew. They were so afraid of getting their RV stuck in the mud that they high-tailed away at the first sight of storm clouds.

1994: The prize was given this year to two young men who got lost at night and ran out of gas at the edge of the playa near the old historic mining town of Sulfur. Since they were cold, they set fire to one of the historic buildings and burnt it to the ground.

1995: Three local teenagers drove off in the wrong direction at night and got stuck in the treacherous Quinn River area at the northeast end of the playa. Without water or supplies, and wearing only t-shirts and pants, they spent the night in their Mazda RX-7. In the morning, they walked away in separate directions. After an extensive, day-long search by a Ranger search and rescue team, they were finally located – one at a time. The last boy was found lying near the railroad tracks just before nightfall, suffering from severe sunburn and dehydration. Their car has never been found.

1996: This year's Donner Award went to all the reckless drivers who turned the playa into a risky game of chance, thereby changing the driving rules for everyone. The top winners were: Fourth place – the college student who rolled his parents' Isuzu Trooper just south of camp. Third place – the two local kids who flipped their Suzuki Quadrunner while playing tag with another moving vehicle. Second place – the drunk driver who sheared off the rear end of another pickup truck during a dust storm. And finally, first place – the spaced-out junkie who borrowed his girlfriend's rental car and then plowed it into an occupied tent, causing severe injuries.

1997: The prize was taken by the former Burning Man medical coordinator. He severely burned his hand while attempting to remove some steel cables, which had been in the flames of the Burn a few minutes before. The runner-up was an attempted gate-crasher whose truck spent four days stuck in the mud.

1998: This Donner Award was carried in style by the BM organizer who set fire to his own tent with a tiki torch. Close runner-ups for this year's award were: the pilot of a giant windsailer who z into the Tower of Rudra; the DPW truck driver who got stuck while crossing the railroad tracks where there was no crossing; the gate crasher who attempted to sneak in by driving down the railroad tracks. Both of the vehicles which got stuck on the tracks were completely destroyed by fast moving freight trains. The giant windsailer was dismantled with a cutting torch by the artist who built the tower.

1999: After a much calmer event, the award was given to a participant who did a swan dive from the top of three-story tower. Somehow, he landed on the playa with only minor injuries. The runner-up was a DPW driver who, over the course of the event, managed to roll two vehicles.

2000: The Donner Award was given to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), not for putting themselves at risk, but for putting the entire community of Burning Man at risk. This was the year that the BLM secretly decided not to patrol the open playa around Black Rock City. Instead, all the BLM Rangers were moved inside the city. Their orders were to concentrate on issuing tickets for social infractions, like peeing on the ground and making pot busts. This unannounced change in policy left our city defenseless against cars roaring through the perimeter fence at 60 mph, thereby seriously endangering participants and resulting in the loss of thousands of dollars worth of admission tickets. It was on Thursday morning at 4 AM, after discovering another break in the fence and seeing tire tracks straight through walk-in camping, that a particularly outraged Danger Ranger drove his trusty Electrolux 4WD into the middle of the agency's sleeping camp and switched on his siren. His words were: "When any government fails to defend its citizens, someone must sound the alarm."

Has the call for safety had an effect? Perhaps. Last year, in 2001, there was no Donner Award winner. The message in the Survival Guide is now well-spread. Many new safety regulations and driving restrictions are in effect. The men in black have applied technology to defend our perimeter, the BLM is still protecting our morals, and The Man is further away than ever.

Drug Guide for Dummies

by TOKYO RICO

Adrian Roberts

LSD

After eating as much acid as you can, find a mirror. Staring at your reflection for an hour or two will enhance that feeling of relaxed quietude which is so typically "acid." Be sure to check for dilated pupils or any strange facial protuberances – these are serious conditions and must be treated immediately by a surgeon! Black Rock City's finest surgeon lives in the head of The Man. You better go up there and get him, quick.

ECSTASY

A hateful drug for hateful people. The first dose makes you loathe humanity, the second sends you into a foaming frenzy. Tired of people touching you? Sick of "that hippie shit?" Pop some E and get ready for a night of hardcore violence. Just make sure to wear thick gloves – you'll probably punch out a window or two as your maniac animal rage is unleashed.

MARIJUANA BROWNIES

The great thing about eating marijuana is that it hits you hard and it hits you fast. If you're not feeling anything thirty seconds after eating a pot brownie, quickly eat three more brownies. Still nothing? You probably messed up the brownies. Oh well. Wait an hour, then work off the extra calories by operating some dangerous machinery.

VICODIN AND LIQUOR

The champagne of drug combinations. This is just the thing if you're looking to impress a special someone with your refined elegance and poise. As Fred Astaire once sang: "I'm puttin' on my top hat/Tyin' up my white tie/Brushin' off my tails/Swallowin' some Vicodin/And chasin' it with liquor." Slug down this sophisticated elixir and soon the glitterati at classy gatherings everywhere will be abuzz with word of your inspired wit. Tip: if someone notices the drooling, assure them you're simply spit-shining your wingtips.

OPIUM

Who needs morning coffee when you've got a pipeful of nature's own "get-up-and-go" at the ready? A puff or two of opium sharpens the mind and sends you out of the RV with a spring in your step, ready for action. But beware: opium also produces the infamous "motormouth effect" that will make your campmates exclaim: "Will that opium junkie EVER shut up?"

HEROIN

For those who prefer a sanitary drug with no risks attached, this is the narcotic of choice – it's so safe to use, and the high so mild it's almost like doing no drug at all. On the other hand, heroin is 100% legal and always pure. To ensure you get the best possible heroin, seek out a dealer who is shivering, submental, and toothless – preferably with a white crust around his mouth. Can't find one? A Gerlach police officer will happily point you in the right direction.

Whuttayagot?

by SAGE COLLINS

Booze = bus fare for this hungry dragon from last year (Draka, R.I.P.)

Gabe Kirchheimer

last rants

A dangerous trend has been snowballing out here, one I've seen a little too often to keep quiet about. I call them 'Whattayagots' – and they're everywhere!

My first run-in with them was last year. A giant art bus made up like a dragon had dozens of happy passengers, and I ran across the Esplanade hoping to be one of them. No such luck.

As soon as I came close enough, the sales pitch hit me: "You can't get on unless you have something to give to the bar."

Those greedy little whores! Charging a fucking fare? Had there been a porta-potty nearby, I would've shut the door and filled up an empty water bottle with a li'l something for the bar.

This year, it happened upon arrival to our fair city when a Greeter – a *Greeter*, of all people – came into the bus to reveal his Whattyagot status. He handed us one playa map and one event guide for all nine of us, and then said "I can give you more if you've *got something* for me ... I'm kinda thirsty."

I handed him a fresh water bottle and he sneered.

"Not water," he groaned. His tariff was one, preferably imported, beer for one map.

It's just revolting to see this happen out here, here where we make a point of getting away from the chain stores and mini malls. The philosophy to buy, buy, buy, has – for some – replaced that of burn, burn, burn.

Are we really living in a city where carrying a bag of trinkets is just as important as carrying water? I can see it now: desert freaks lining up outside a theme camp, each one having a playa gift as a cover charge, and the have-nots crowd outside, trying to convince the bouncer to let them in.

Forget about running around naked. Now kids, you'll need *pockets* if you want the *full* Burning Man experience.

Which is better: cyanide or freaks?

by DR. LIZARD

Canadian mining giant Noranda has over a billion dollars in gold claims staked in the Calico Mountains. They have been pressuring the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to shut down Burning Man so that 30,000 environmental peace freaks don't fall in love with that viewshed. They have managed to get Black Rock City shoved down into a tiny corner of the desert where the hills block that exquisite view. If you go out to the trash fence and look northwest, you can still barely see them. That was our view for the first few years.

Noranda pours money into far-right Christian groups who think we are Satanists or something, so that they will try to shut us down, as well as the Oregon-California Trails Association, who protest us even though we are nowhere near the trail.

The whole idea of making us hold BM in the same spot for multiple years is to ensure that there is a "long-term" effect on the playa so that they can kick us out – as if turning the Calicos into a strip mine with cyanide pits is better for the environment than a bunch of freaks running around in costumes for one week every year. Our only hope is that the BLM fees from BM eventually exceed those from mining land use revenue. Money talks. This is the real reason for those high ticket prices, folks. And you should pay extra if you can.